

Peggy Baker a dance marvel

By MICHAEL CRABB
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

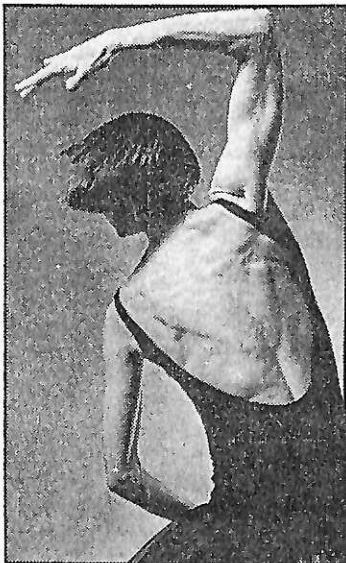
Most dancers would die for a body like Peggy Baker's. Come to that, they'd probably settle for her feet.

Seeing what the Toronto-based dancer/choreographer can express through the subtle articulation of bone and muscle is in itself a marvel. Add a humane, compassionate spirit and you have a performer of unique physical and emotional range.

This is reflected in the five solos and duets Baker is offering through Sunday at Harbourfront Centre's Premiere Dance Theatre.

Although she could successfully fill an evening with the kind of voluptuous movement contained in *Her Heart* — economically choreographed scenes evoking key emotional phases in one woman's life — Baker is courageous enough to take bigger emotional risks.

In presenting choreographer Doug Varone's *The Volpe Sisters*, for example, Baker eschews music altogether as well as lyrical movement to portray a poignant and dysfunctional re-



PEGGY'S BACK: Dancer/choreographer Baker displays a unique body.

lationship. Baker, in baggy frock and glasses, is torn between the need for comfort and her inner fears and resentments. Janie Brendel's almost pained and dispassionate response creates an edgy emo-

tional counterpoint.

Baker's own *Geometry Of The Circle* goes further in depicting contained lives. It's a touching duet with her own composer/musician husband, Ahmed Hassan, confined to a wheelchair because of multiple sclerosis.

As Hassan pushes himself in chase of Baker around a magical garden of bright surreal plants — vocalizing a wonderful, amplified soundscape of grunts, whistles and breathing noises — you almost forget his freedom of movement is circumscribed. He is the satyr to Baker's nymph. But as Baker finally balances on the footrest of Hassan's wheelchair, holding his arms and gazing up intently into his face as he releases short, emotion-charged breaths, you are suddenly struck by the intense intimacy of the moment. Only Baker could draw a universal statement of love and hope from such an image without plunging into self-indulgent sentimentality.

Michael Crabb is host/producer of CBC radio's *The Arts Report*